

My third point is that Section 50 of the principal Act should be amended. Sub-section (1) of Section 50 of the principal Act says:

“The Board may made by-laws consistent with this Act and the rules made thereunder, to provide for” etc. etc.

Rules 31(1), 36(2) and 36(3) deal with the power to incur expenditure. Here, Sir, I would like to suggest the insertion of a new Rule 36(4) whereby the Board should be given power to transfer funds up to a certain limit, say Rs. 50,000/- from one sanctioned Development Scheme to another when a particular scheme cannot be implemented or if something goes wrong during the process of implementation. This will not only enable the Board to avoid unnecessary wastage of money but also enable it to utilise the money for other good causes.

SHRI C. K. CHANDRAPAN (Cannanore): Sir, this is a very small Bill which the Minister is moving, but I would like to take this opportunity to bring to his notice some of the important problems of the Tea Board and the tea industry. The principal Act was enacted and came into force in 1952. It was to provide for control of the Government of India of the tea industry and for that purpose to establish the Tea Board. The Board was meant to take care of the tea industry in our country, but I must say that the Board has not fulfilled the task which was bestowed on it.

17:00 hrs.

Many of the hon. Members have pointed out one of the very important problems, the problem of sick tea gardens. I do not know the mind of the hon. Commerce Minister, what he thinks about their future, as also of the foreign-owned tea estates. The foreign-owned tea gardens in our country continue to be one of the sources of corruption, as it was pointed out here; it provides them an opportunity for over for over-invoicing, under-invoicing etc. and they try to control the prices to the detriment of our interests. All these things are there.

If you take the tea industry, its role in our economy is very significant. It contributes nearly Rs. 500 crores and it employs two million workers. The cultivation is around 360000 acres and the production is 500 million kilograms of tea. In this industry, according to an answer provided to a questionnaire by the Tea Board, nearly 175 tea gardens were considered sick. But it is a well known fact, how these gardens become sick. Shri George

Fernandes explained how the industries become sick. In the case of tea gardens also, the reasons are the same. The same story is the story of the sick tea gardens. I would like to ask the hon. Minister, what they propose to do about the sick tea gardens. I would like the Government to take over these sick gardens and also to nationalise the foreign-owned companies. I do not think, there is any other way by which you will be able to save this industry from the crisis.

Just now, one of the hon. Members was pleading for reduction of the excise duty imposed on tea. Well, in my opinion, the excise duty should be a little more. There was a time, when there was no export duty on tea and the exporters enjoyed a lot of profit. At least now, you have imposed a small export duty of Rs. 5.00. In my view, if you want to control the prices and provide our people with a little more tea, and tea with pleasure, then you should impose more excise duty so that the profit of the tea exporters might go down and the prices will come down in the internal market also.

Then I would say a few words about the tea plantation labourers. It can be said that it is a case of classical exploitation which is still going on in the tea plantations. I need not narrate the kind of wages they are receiving. Just now, I was looking into a report of 1975 from West Bengal and it says that the average earning of a worker is Rs. 3.85, less than 50% of the wage fixed under the Minimum Wages Act for agricultural labourers. That is the wage we are giving to the workers in the tea gardens in West Bengal. In Kerala the condition might be a little better, but, not satisfactory. So, it should be the endeavour of the Tea Board to provide for a reasonable wage to the working classes who are working and producing tea and thereby contributing to the national exchequer.

There is a lot of provident fund arrears and the tea estate owners are masters of keeping provident fund arrears—I need not go into the statistics as the time is short—and the government should take firm measures against those who are defaulting in the provident fund.

Housing of tea garden workers—the condition is deplorable. I do not know whether the Minister has any opportunity in recent times to visit any tea gardens. If you go to Kerala or if you go to West Bengal or any part of the country where tea gardens are there, you can see that they are living in one of the worst imaginable conditions under which no human being can exist but they live there and work. The Tea Board should have taken it on themselves as a duty to see that something is done for the housing of the tea garden workers.

[Shri C.K. Chandrapan]

Now, the other question is about bonus and I hope the Minister will say something about it as to what will be his policy now with regard to bonus for tea garden workers.

Then, Sir, the foreign-owned companies were asked by the Reserve Bank of India to submit a report about the dilution of their equity share. If I understood correctly, according to press reports; upto March 31, hardly any foreign-owned tea gardens cared to reply to the Reserve Bank of India. If that is so, it is a very serious thing. According to FERA, it is mandatory on the foreign-owned companies in this country to dilute their equity capital to 74% and the foreign tea-garden owners and the sterling companies care two hoots for our FERA and they care nothing for the directives given by the Reserve Bank of India. I would like the Minister to say something about this.

In short, while concluding, I would like to say that the Tea Board, if it is to function properly and if it is to succeed in achieving the aims for which the Act has been brought into force, then, I think these proposals have to be taken into consideration and something positive will have to be done. I hope the Minister will respond positively. I conclude.

SHRI TARUN GOGOI (Jorhat): The Bill relates to very minor changes. There is not much controversy. While extending our support to the Bill, I would like to draw the attention of the Minister to the conditions in the Indian tea industry.

The tea industry in India, as you know, occupies an important place in the economic field of the country as a foreign exchange earner. Besides it is also a labour-intensive industry which provides employment to about a million workers.

Though this industry is a very important one and though it has been existing for a long time, the industry has not been developed and it had not been extended as much consideration and attention by the Ministry as it deserved. For the last three years the industry has been making very huge profits, but if you compare the condition of the tea workers, you will find that they are not getting a fair deal. Besides, if you compare the condition of the tea garden workers with that of the worker in other industries say the textile industry or even with the public sector industry, you will find that there is much difference as regards wages and other facilities also. Though there is the Plantation Act and according to that Act, certain facilities have to be provided to the workers, you will

find that it is honoured more in the breach than in its compliance.

As regards the housing facilities, I know many of the tea gardens in my own constituency and I was myself born and brought up in a tea estate. I have found that in certain tea estates the condition is worse than what it was 40 years back when I was born.

Though every worker should have proper housing facilities, but if you go and see, the workers are living in dilapidated houses.

Even adequate drinking water facilities have not been provided.

In a few gardens there is some medical facility. On the other hand, in most of the tea gardens, there is practically no medical facility.

As regards education facilities, the condition is very deplorable. The number of illiterate persons has been increasing as compared to the increase of literate persons in the neighbouring areas. I hope the Minister will give his attention to educate the labourers also.

In many of the estates, the owners are more concerned with their profits only. They give preference to quantity rather than to quality.

Many of the tea estates have become sick because of mismanagement. Certain estates are making profits while the others are losing. It is just because of mismanagement. I hope Government will take over the sick industries.

There is the tea research institute in my own Constituency. That is at Tuklai. It is not in the hands of the Government. It is managed privately. It should be taken over by the Government. There is discontentment among the junior scientists there. There is a lot of disparity in wages and other facilities between the top officials and the junior scientists. As a result of it the junior scientists do not get the incentive.

Bonus for the year 1974 was paid in 1975 @8.33%. Excess amount paid to the tune of 4.33% was deducted after that. In 1975 all the tea estates made huge profits but no bonus was paid. I hope the Minister will give due consideration. There has been great dis-satisfaction and discontentment among the workers who